



HEALTH ADVISORY #37

Handling Animal Bites: Important Rabies Information

TO: West Virginia Healthcare Providers, Emergency Departments, and Urgent Care Centers

**FROM: Loretta E. Haddy, PhD, State Epidemiologist
WVDHHR, Bureau for Public Health**

DATE: October 15, 2010

**LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS,
EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND EMERGENCY CARE CENTERS**

OTHER RECIPIENTS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO APPROPRIATE STAFF AS APPLICABLE

The following information is being provided to West Virginia healthcare providers to increase rabies awareness and promote appropriate management of animal bite cases.

In West Virginia, human animal bites/exposures are reportable to local health departments within 24 hours. During 2009, approximately 2,500 animal bite/exposures were reported in the state. The animal encounter reporting form can be found at the following website:

http://www.wvdhhr.org/phs/forms/SG-58_Animal_Encounter_Report.pdf

Providers should work with local health department personnel to determine the appropriate management of animal bite/exposure cases. This may include confinement of the biting animal, testing the biting animal for rabies, and administering rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to the bite/exposure victim. However, not all animal bite/exposure cases will result in the need for rabies PEP; in 2009, 127 animal bite/exposures reported in West Virginia resulted in PEP administration to the bite/exposure victim. More information on rabies PEP can be found at:

http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/resources/acip_recommendations.html

Most rabies cases in West Virginia occur in wildlife; the predominant rabies strain in the state is raccoon strain. Please go to the following website for more information on rabies in West Virginia:

<http://www.wvdep.org/AZIndexofInfectiousDiseases/RabiesHumanorAnimal/tabid/1543/Default.aspx>

Please see the attached fact sheet entitled "Rabies Top 10" for more about rabies.

This message was directly distributed by the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health to local health departments and partner associations. Receiving entities are responsible for further disseminating the information as appropriate to the target audience.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance, warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation. May not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation. Unlikely to require immediate action.

Rabies Top 10

- 10 Rabies is a serious infectious disease.** Rabies virus is transmitted by the saliva (most commonly through a bite) or neural tissue of an infected mammal. Once infected and symptomatic, rabies is >99% fatal.
- 9 Rabies is most common among wildlife.** Animals that are most commonly positive for rabies in West Virginia include raccoons, bats, skunks and foxes. Squirrels, chipmunks, moles, mice, rats are considered low risk animals.
- 8 Efforts are ongoing to control rabies in wildlife.** Raccoon strain rabies is endemic to West Virginia. USDA conducts an oral rabies vaccination program annually in West Virginia to immunize raccoons.
- 7 Rabies is preventable in pets and livestock.** Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for cats, dogs, ferrets and livestock. Spay or neuter cats and dogs.
- 6 Rabies is preventable in humans.** Proper post-exposure management includes wound management and evaluation for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).
- 5 ACIP recently made changes to PEP recommendations.** Earlier this year, the ACIP reduced the number of doses needed for PEP in previously unimmunized persons from 5 to 4. The series is given on days 0, 3, 7 and 14.
- 4 PEP is not always necessary.** Several factors need to be considered before PEP is initiated, including type of animal involved, circumstances of exposure, availability for confinement or testing, rabies vaccination status, and location of exposure.
- 3 Help is available for decisions regarding PEP.** Timely consultation regarding decisions to initiate PEP can be obtained through your local health department or the Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (1-800-423-1271).
- 2 Indigent vaccine programs for PEP are available.** See www.pparx.org or www.rxhope.com for patients needing PEP but unable to afford it.
- 1 Animal bites and administration of PEP are reportable events by law.** Report all animal bites and PEP administration to your local health department.

